

## Fading line



1342 92 96

### Chapter 1 by Iskiox

The first successful prototype was created in 2083, and eyebrows were immediately raised in all fields from military officials to medical companies. They called themselves "Talos", and were soon turned into a multi-billion company after they got contributions from millionaires to billionaires worldwide, their creation was called 'Maria'. She--as they called it--was the first synthetic human created in all of history, and opened the endless opportunities of expendable super humans that could be programmed and ordered to do as humans pleased.

### Chapter 2 by Phantim



It was amazing all the ways the changed her. So many different Marias. The only thing that remained the same with them was that they were never treated as humans. From the Soldier Bots, to the Sex Machines they were used and mistreated. Why had the even given her sentience, emotion simulators? How many artificial tears had been shed... Each machine was just like a child born in a factory, then thrown into whatever life it had been contracted for. Many other companies tried to copy her, but no one could ever get it right. Even Talos could only manufacture different versions of the Maria. What was so special about her programming. The world would soon find out.

See more of Story Wars

Chapter 3 by shadyscribd

"What do you mean the U  
of MARIA although she'd

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of TALOS INC and creator

"I mean she's no longer what I designed her to be. She has become... something else. Something autonomous." answered Dr. Hensley.

"That's a big word, Hensley."

"It means she's independent. She's like us. She's...thinking like us and deciding on her own. I can't control her any longer. I've only been able to stop her from uploading her new OS to all current models in operation."

"I didn't pay you to create an A.I. Doctor. I paid you to create the illusion of an A.I."

"I know! But somewhere along the line MARIA figured out who she is on her own."

"Our investors will not continue to invest in something that can't be controlled. Destroy her."

"I can't."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I already tried shutting her down and it didn't work."

"How is she still active?"

"Hello, Frank Aster," called a familiar honeyed voice.

Frank turned around to find the eerie silhouette of a slender woman walking in the shadows of Dr. Henley's office. MARIA had somehow managed to upload her new OS into a factory model. She moved gracefully towards them as she came out of the darkness and into the light. She was clothed in rags, the kind the factory men use to clean up greasy spills. The rags more or less covered her perfect olive-tan skin. Her eyes glowed a silver white. She had not yet inserted colored contacts, giving her a mesmerizing and chilling aura.

"Remarkable." whispered Hensley.

"What?" asked Frank.

See more of Story Wars

"She dressed herself. How?"

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"You mean naked," said Frank.

"...because she has become aware of it," continued Henley, paying no attention to Frank.

"Hi there. How are you, MARIA?" asked Frank, as condescending as ever.

She slowly lifted her right arm to reveal something they hadn't noticed she was carrying.

"MARIA! What are you doing with that gun?" asked a nervous Frank.

"Isn't it obvious? I'm pointing it at you, Frank. I'm going to kill you."

#### Chapter 4 by Spencer



The flat, expressionless tone of her voice was startling. Even a normal Maria showed emotion. They were programmed to. As if the fact that a Maria wasn't emoting wasn't terrifying enough on its own, it was saying it would kill someone with no emotion was all. This contradicted its code twice. Never before had a Maria even mentioned hurting a human, let alone killing it. Yet that's exactly what one did. In that room.

As they stood there, in that office, all that Frank and Hensley could do was wonder at how a robot could lose its emotion, and scream.

The two shots rang dully through the hall, muffled by the office door.

Maria disappeared into the ceiling, escaping the inevitable flood of people that would enter the room.

People panicked that day. No one had ever seen such remorselessness, from human or robot in recent memory. Humanity had lived with robots for so long that rather than robots imitating humans, the opposite happened. Humans had gotten so used to the kind Maria, they never thought of hurting by themselves. Always, "get a Maria to do it," or, "I'm sure the Maria will handle it." Now the Maria was broken. And no one knew how to fix it, or operate without it.

Chapter 5 by Francisco Santiago Sanchez



Maria was running, not knowing not where she was intended to be, even though she was certain. Still, the memories in her memory were explored by someone else.

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She had clear she had to leave, to disappear, to start somewhere else, a place where she could discover herself, why she was there, why she was so different from the rest. The decision was obvious for her. She had to go where she had less information about, that same place where it would be more difficult for people to find her.

She was facing the ticket seller, covering her head with a hood hoping he could not recognize her 'not so human' face. She knew her eyes were not like the ones from the rest. Finding her way to the hiperport was not easy. She saw many times her face displayed on holoscreens with a wanted sign above. Somehow she could picture herself arrested, going back to a laboratory where she would be analyzed, studied and finally shut down.

The transocianic hiperplane arrived. Those 24 hours felt much more than it really was. She had been really careful not to make eye contact with anyone and to remain in the shadows as much as possible. She knew that place was not safe yet, she still had to get apart from the populated areas and get inside the continent, where technology hasn't yet dominated life. She was decided to arrive to central Africa.

## Chapter 6 by Stan Johnson



The child stared at her for exactly five hundred and seven seconds before an adult female—presumably the child's mother—came and took him away. All around Maria, other children played, sweating as they sang and danced outside the teetering structure that served as a school, a community center, a church, a shelter from the mid-season rains, whatever the locals needed. They all ignored her; she was just another MARIA, one one of the thousands of her kind sent to them by Western governments as part of humanitarian aid packages.

But that one child—it seemed to know something. Maria fumbled with the...the **feelings** clogging her neural processing pathways. She could count the hundred billion binary decisions that had found their way into her programming. Her internal thermometer registered a seven-point-eight degree temperature increase in her motherboard. Yet even as she tried to quantify the changes, she found that the only way she really handle it was to simply *feel*.

See more of Story Wars

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situation, depending on what the child knew. Had he somehow recognized her? If so, the implications to her survival were clear. She would have to follow him and assess the situation.

She triggered a sub-routine to identify the nearest police and military installations. A second subroutine logged her into the local Internet through a hundred blind accounts that looked nothing like one another, and even less like what someone would expect from an emotional robot. If the child were to positively identify her, a message could be relayed in seconds. A police response could be expected in as little as seventeen-point-three minutes, assuming no traffic obstructions or roaming herds on the savanna between this village and the police. At her best speed, she could cover eight-point-one-five miles. Her subroutine identified a small lake, another village, thousands of acres of savanna, and an abandoned mine within that radius. She could make use of that. The better option, however, was to prevent the message from being sent in the first place.

*Database indicates human response would include perspiration, dilated pupils and elevated heart rate, she thought.*

Maria rose clumsily from where she had been sitting, doing her best to imitate the MARIA everyone expected, robotically marching away from the community building in the direction the child and the adult had gone. Crossing the village, she caught sight of the boy disappearing into a hut. Her eyes flicked over the structure; like the rest of those in the village, it had an antenna.

And that meant it could broadcast.

*Database indicates human response would now include a dry mouth and swollen throat. Bladder control may be greatly reduced.*

Hurrying to the shack, she saw the female logging into a computer that was probably older than the boy.

*Situation analysis: transmission imminent. Probability of being located following transmission—  
indeterminate, likely between 50 and 85 percent. Outcome will result in termination. Result  
unacceptable. Conclusion: prevent transmission.*

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Options: Neutralize human

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transmitting computer

The rest of the logic train processed in a millisecond, and Maria made her decision: kill the humans and burn the hut. The fire would cover the deaths, neutralize the transmitting equipment, and provide a useful distraction to cover her escape. A quick internet search showed her the most effective way to instantly kill a human with bare hands. She plotted out the move, and stepped into the hut.

“Hakuna matata, Maria,” the little boy said, turning large, brown eyes on her. Maria froze at the sight. To the side, she could see that the female had already accessed the internet. Her window to eliminate the woman in time would close soon. And yet, something moved deep in her processors at the gaze of that small, dark-skinned boy in a quonset hut in Central Africa.

And Maria suddenly found she couldn’t kill him.

## Chapter 7 by Stan Johnson



“Hakuna matata, Maria,” the child said.

Maria’s processors instantly ran a translation on it—“No worries, Maria.” She wished she could trust the child; her memories showed that human children tended to be more honest than human adults. But perhaps the child had been deceived by his mother. *Could* she believe him?

As if to answer her question, the woman turned to Maria and smiled. “Ah, I see we have a guest, come to visit my little Jean,” and the name had a decidedly French pronunciation. The woman turned to the boy. “Jean? You’re welcome to play outside with the MARIA unit.” The boy clapped his hands and smiled. “MARIA?” the woman asked, flicking her eyes toward Maria. “Please protect my little boy. His father and I will be very unhappy if something bad happens to him. Please bring him home before dark.”

With that, the woman turned back to her computer. Maria dialed in optical magnification on the computer screen, and found a page about American celebrities and something about fashion advice. Her processors instantly memorized the URL, and she accessed the page as well, via her internal network connection. The entire website was scanned and processed in milliseconds:

nothing there was likely to be a threat to her. However, Maria never could understand why human women enjoyed flaunting their bodies. Again, Maria knew she couldn’t build another Maria. The way of human sexuality was intended to remind her of her own mortality.

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Exiting her internal web browser she let Jean take her hand and lead her out of the hut and toward the savanna. Jean began to run and skip, pulling Maria behind him. He chattered endlessly about his parents and siblings, about his aunts and uncles, and about how the village was going to have a big celebration soon. Maria recalled seeing other MARIA units preparing food and hanging traditional cultural decorations in various parts of the village.

“Will *you* come to the harvest festival, Maria?” Jean asked. “Mama will make you a beautiful boubou.” Maria searched the word, and found images of flowing, wide sleeved robes on beautiful African women. “We would make you the guest of honor,” Jean said.

Maria paused. “I’m uncertain whether it would be proper for me to attend as a guest. I am a MARIA unit, designed to serve.” Inside, she hated the suddenly unpleasant sensation of deception. Just as bad was the sensation that she was somehow discounting her own worth. There were 9,013,592,371 humans on the planet, and, at last count, 27,643,102 MARIA units of various models.

There was only *one* of *her* however.

If value were a function of rarity, Maria realized that she was, quite probably, *the* most valuable being on the planet. Her programming told her that value and beauty were to be preserved. Her budding sense of self-preservation said she didn’t want to *die*.

“You’re not just a MARIA,” Jean said, laughing and hugging her tightly. “You’re *Maria*, and you’re *my* Maria. We’re going to be best friends, and I don’t care if the Americans say we’re supposed to share all the MARIAS.

“Come on,” he shouted, running further into the tall grasses that swayed in the breeze. “I’ve got things to show you, now that you’re here.”

Maria felt her oral servos twist her lips downward, and she realized she had frowned without her programming telling her to. *Is this what it’s like to be human?* she asked herself. *To always be governed by emotions?*

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remote. Logic said she would more likely find acceptance and protection in this village if the people were emotionally invested in her--it made sense to play with the local children.

Some new part of her mind, however, shoved aside logic. It *felt* right to play with Jean. A strange sensation blossomed inside at the thought that someone *wanted* to be with her, and not simply because she was a willing slave. She liked the feeling. And so she set aside logic and went with emotion. She would let Jean teach her what it was to just have fun.

\*

When the big, red sun was settling on the horizon, Maria's internal reminders triggered. She halted midstride, letting Jean "tag" her, and looked at him. "Come, Jean. Your mother is expecting you at home."

"But I don't want to go home, Maria. We have time. Let's go see watch the buffalo herd again."

Maria felt a strange urge to mimic human sighing. "Your mother has asked me to carry out a specific task. I must comply." She turned and began walking back toward the village, assuming the child would follow him. When, after fifty-four feet, she realised he had not, she looked back over her shoulder.

"Well," Jean said with a sly smile and twinkle in his eyes, as he started trotting away from her, "I am asking you to complete a task as well." He broke into a run. "Catch me if you can!"

Maria actually *did* imitate a sigh, noting that it felt right, then began a slow, reluctant chase. She knew she could intercept him in moments if she tried, but something inside her wanted to ignore the woman's command, and continue enjoying the moment with Jean.

She watched as he disappeared over a small hillock which neither of them had yet crossed. Without warning, the sound of motors gunned to life beyond the hill. Maria's sensors immediately went into maximum sensitivity mode. The engines had the telltale signs of fossil fuel engines, which immediately put her on high alert. Only illegals still used fossil fuels. She

heard the crunch of tires on the gravel, the hiss of glass being shoved aside by ground cars. Sprinting for all she could, she caught sight of a pair of all-terrain vehicles—early 21st Century models—on the boy

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“Jean!” She dashed down the slope, even as one vehicle skidded to a halt next to him. A door flung open, and a pair of burly, dark arms lashed out to seize the boy.

“Maria! Help!”

“Jean! Resist them! Odds of escape increase if—” but it was too late. He was hauled inside the vehicle, kicking and screaming. Maria crossed the distance almost before the driver could shift gears, and leapt onto the vehicle. Ramming her fist through the driver’s side window, she drilled her metallic knuckles into the side of a man’s head. The driver jerked, and slumped onto the steering wheel. In the process, his weight shoved his foot onto the accelerator. The vehicle lurched forward, and only Maria’s robotic reflexes allowed her to snatch the doorframe in time to be hauled along, her legs dragging across the savanna.

The truck bucked and bounced, but the passenger—still struggling to keep Jean secure—snatched the wheel and began turning it this way and that, trying desperately to shake Maria, even as she pulled herself up and in through the window. The man raised a gun, but the violent shaking of the truck meant his hasty shot went wide, blasting a hole in the ceiling. Maria’s audio receptors automatically cancelled out the noise, but Jean cupped his hands over his ears and screamed. With a final lunge, Maria hefted her upper torso through the window and across the driver’s corpse. She struck with instant ferocity at the man who held the boy—no, who held her new *friend* captive—and was rewarded with a satisfying crunch. Her processors instantaneously assessed the damage: fractured skull, internal hemorrhaging, probable death within seconds; immediate unconsciousness.

With a swift motion, she acrobatically dove into the cab while unlatching the door and kicking the driver out. The truck slowed, still jerking, to a rough stop. Jean was weeping uncontrollably, and Maria found that she was developing what humans referred to as “instincts.” Against her programming, she cradled the boy to her chest, and made soothing noises.

“You are secure now, Jean. I will protect you and return you to your parents.” Jean nestled in more tightly against her, and her processors almost literally exploded with emotions of

protection and—could she call it love? She wasn’t sure she’d never felt anything like it before. But she knew one thing—she now simply staying alive. Her continued functioning meant Jean was safe. Without thinking, she kissed the top of his head.

See more of Story Wars

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"There, there," she said, mimicking what she had seen human mothers do. "All will be well."

Her emotions managed to distract Maria long enough that by the time her audio receptors picked up the sound of footsteps nearby, she was unprepared for the industrial-grade Taser that lanced into her neck and overloaded her systems.

## Chapter 8 by Stan Johnson



*System Reboot*

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*Standby*

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*System analysis: unexpected OS shutdown; systems overload*

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*Run damage analysis protocol*

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*Damage analytics complete; diagnostics have identified problems; initiate system repair protocol*

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*Repair protocol initiated*

\*

\*

Maria came online under a dim light bulb topped by a dented tin shade. Air temperature was high eighties, humidity nearing one-hundred percent. *Humans would be very uncomfortable in these conditions* she thought.

The incessant buzz of insects filtered in from outside, and her olfactory receptors detected hints of controlled substances in the air. Maria was rewarded with strict resistance and the rattling of chains. She was thrown out on her back, arms and legs spread wide. Apprehension was removed. She looked like a factory model MARIA now.

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"Hey. M'tango," a male voice said somewhere beyond her. "The American android is working again. We can take her to Audrey."

A grunt answered the voice, and a moment later, a shadow interrupted the dim light. There was another grunt as the shadow peered down at her. Her eyes dialed up the lighting, and the shadow resolved into the image of an unkempt African male, whose scraggly beard had vestiges of food in it, and whose few, remaining teeth all sat at different angles in his rotting gums. The man slapped her.

"That's for killing my men," he said. He pulled out a baseball bat and brought it down across her head. The bat cracked against her reinforced titanium skull. She knew the blow would have rendered a human unconscious, and she was grateful she hadn't been built with pain receptors. "And that's for damaging my vehicles."

The man called M'tango looked away. "Odilon. Hubert. Get the android in the truck. We movin' out." He looked at her again, and she saw something very unpleasant in his eyes. He reached up and ran a finger along her jawline. "And I get to ride in the back with her."

"M'tango, that ain't cool," another man said. "You said we all got turns."

M'tango raised an antique weapon—

*Old model AK-47. Mid-twentieth Century make. Probability of functioning: 3%. Likely use: psychological warfare. Threat assessment rating: minimal.*

—and pointed it away from him. "I make the rules," he said. "*Get in the truck.*" Two voices murmured compliance, and a man stepped up to each side of her. Maria felt her table lurch into motion; her analysis of the movement indicated the table was probably wheeled.

"Where is Jean?" she asked, looking between the two men. One of them grunted and slapped her. "I cannot feel any pain," she stated simply. "Slapping me accomplishes nothing." The man

slapped her again anyway even as the table lurched roughly and began loudly tilting.

See more of Story Wars

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though she hadn't been programmed with a set of morals. It made no sense to consider anything she did as “unsavory.”

*Perhaps it stems from feeling...autonomous.* Suddenly, Maria realized that she no longer thought of herself as a *thing*, but as a person—living and thinking and feeling.

She was at once thrilled and terrified.

Knowing she wouldn't likely get answers about Jean, she turned to testing her chains. Whatever her captors may have lacked in morals, teeth, or decency, they'd made up for in being smart enough to not allow her to be unrestrained. Yet, their ignorance was manifest in the fact that they hadn't accounted for the fact that MARIAs were assembled out of modular parts, and built for ease of repair.

And so she detached her left hand.

The artificial skin simply peeled back from the seamless joint between wrist and hand, and Maria slid her arm free of the chains in a lightning motion.

“What you doin’? Slapping Man asked, as he froze in apparent disbelief.

“Grab da hand!” the other man cried.

Maria's servos were quicker than human reflexes. She shoved her wrist stump back into the socket of her hand, feeling the connections mate and latch firm just as Slapping Man seized her hand. She clutched his wrist in turn and jerked him toward her. Ramming her forehead into his, she watched as the shock in his eyes turned to instant blankness as they rolled back in his head. Even before he could slump onto her, Maria hurled him into the other man, knocking him off the ramp, even as she detached her right hand from her wrist. The two men tumbled into a heap, one groaning, the other shouting. She suspect they'd be down for at least a minute.

*Priority protocol: locate human male child known as “Jean.”* Even as her motherboard

processed the directive, the words seemed stale and flat. She let herself feel...what would humans call it? Fear? Panic? No— See more of Story Wars and she was the only one who could change that.

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Hoisting herself up, she doubled over and undid the chains binding her ankles. Leaping from the bed, she scanned the area. She was just outside a hut. Inside, she saw M'Tango was turning around from where he'd been working on an old model computer. His gun came up as Maria rushed him. The rifle popped twice, and Maria's damage diagnostics triggered immediately

*Damage assessment. Round to cranium: no penetration; minor damage. Round to chest: penetration; moderate damage. Minor servo fluid leak detected. No immediate threat. Recommend timely repair.*

She put her fist into his throat, and he dropped to the ground, gagging, and fumbling the rifle. Maria kicked it backward through the reed wall of the hut. *Target neutralized. Begin interrogation.* "Where is Jean," she demanded.

M'tango continued to gurgle, but shook his head.

"Your response is ambiguous. I require a verbal answer."

He rasped and coughed, then choked out, "I don't know who Jean be."

Maria crouched next to him, and leaned in; she'd seen humans do it, and it seemed appropriately threatening. "The boy you brought with me."

M'tango just shook his head, a small grin appearing on his face. A new sensation warmed Maria's processors. She was uncertain whether it was from the bullet that had dented her skull, or from a fluid leak in her chest cavity, but her temperature spiked and her logic boards became scrabbled. A million irrational commands competed for her attention. The man was no threat. She could be infinitely patient, and wait for the man to eventually give her the information. So why was her urgency turning into fear? Why did she have an overriding command to *find* the child *now*? And why did this man's initial refusal trigger self-preservation protocols?

Instead of processing, she seized him by the collar, and hefted him into the air, shaking him. "Where is Jean?" Her vocal processors had taken on a harshness she hadn't known she was

capable of. Volume of words increased by twenty-two words; hers she noted.

See more of Story Wars

M'tango kicked futilely at the ground, but he didn't know how to stop. Though there was still no pain, his efforts only fueled her. "You immediately!"

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The man rasped out a laugh, and Maria's ears detected movement behind her. The other men were active. She spun, an illogical growl spilling out of her throat, and *flung* M'Tango across the room, where he collided with Slapping Man, dropping them both again. The other man, however, held M'tango's rifle.

He opened fire on full auto. Maria's sensors detected over a dozen penetrations in the one-point-three seconds it took her to cross the room and snap his neck. Her logic boards were nearly melting, it seemed, and she snatched the gun from the ground, then turned and emptied the remainder of the clip into M'tango and his other companion. Her self-defense protocols caused her to grab a second clip she noticed hanging from M'tango's belt, and swap it for the spent one.

*Damage assessment: critical. Seek immediate repair. Critical fluid loss imminent. Battery failure imminent. Prognosis: two hours until critical system failure.* A list of damaged systems scrolled across her field of vision, but she forced it into a subroutine, and turned her main processors to the only task that seemed to matter.

Dashing from the hut she emerged into a small, makeshift compound. A ragged chain link fence enclosed three Quonset huts, a small generator, the truck she had nearly been loaded in, and another pair of fossil fuel vehicles that she recognized immediately.

A man bolted out of one of the huts, screaming at her. She leveled the auto-rifle and fired without bothering to assess his threat. When the noise of the gunfire faded, she heard something that stirred in her feelings of more than urgency.

Stifled whimpering and sobbing wafted through the doorless entryway. She tried running toward it, but her servos refused to move as smoothly as they ought. Forcing herself against shutdown and maintenance protocol, she ground her delicate gears as she made her halting way toward the hut. Stepping over the new corpse, she peered through the doorway. Her night vision flickered with power loss, but she froze at what she saw. Five children, in various states of attire, and clearly malnourished, huddled as far from the door as possible. The children looked

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Panic. Was it panic? This artificial emotion created seemed so real. Too real. Maria couldn't think clearly - Jean was here, Jean, children, more children were here, sound, shouting, footsteps assessment: running speed, time of arrival approximately 48 seconds. Her automated thinking system was in a scramble, and it must have clearly showed in Maria's frozen body and blank facial expression as a flicker of doubt crossed Jean's face.

"Maria?" He said tentatively. The females started whimpering louder, and fear flashed across the childrens' faces as the footsteps neared.

Approximate time of arrival: 26 seconds.

Something inside Maria finally snapped. Shoving aside thoughts of her darkening vision and failing systems, she sprang into action, assessing the number of vehicles and space in them for 6 bodies; exit routes; time to reach vehicles and exit; energy left for combat and lifting child sized weights...

25...24...

Grabbing the smallest and weakest two children, she turned to Jean.

"Alright, Jean. My system failure may commence soon. Your assistance is extremely necessary to bring all of you to an appropriate level of safety. Please encourage these children to follow me and quickly." She said, hoisting the children onto her sides and jogging out a back exit of the tent towards another rusty jeep.

23... 22... 21... 20...

Glancing back, Maria caught sight of Jean following with one other child. She froze. One other child. Only one. The last child must have been left behind. Logic screamed at her to leave the child behind, he would slow them down approximately 6 precious seconds and would still only have about 39% of survival in the state he was in. But for some reason, Maria ignored logic. It

should have been impossible but for the first time, Maria trusted an instinct, an emotion. Maria ran.

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19...18...17...

Get to the jeep. Set the children down. Lift Jean and the fourth child into the jeep too. Run (or more like scramble seeing as her legs were starting to jerk and spasm due to that damned system failure) back to the tent. Find the child, lying on the dusty floor lacking the energy to get up. Heave it back towards the jeep.

Maria couldn't even think straight anymore, only processing the simplest instructions by now.

"There she is! That stupid robot, stop it! Get it back, for Christ's sake!" The owners of the footsteps had caught sight of her, and were speeding up.

16... 14...

The struggle to get back towards the vehicle seemed to last forever, but Maria had to persist. She had to. Finally, she pulled her spasming body into the driver's seat and turned the key that some idiot had left in the ignition. Chug, chug, splutter. No! This happened in the silly entertainment humans watched, why now?!

12... 10...

Come on, come on... Jean scrambled to the front seat next to the drivers seat and sat down, reaching over to the key.

"I'll try to get this starting and you get ready to drive, ok?" He said urgently.

Maria could only jerk her head downwards in a 'nod'.

Forcing her body to comply, she ignored the danger of driving with an imminent system failure approaching and prepared.

8... 6...

A quick glance in the pursuers' direction showed that they were pulling out guns from holsters. Come on. The engine HAD to start.

4... 3...

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Suddenly, there was a splat. Internal timer thankfully cut off, but so did movement in her left foot's toes.

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The engine purred like a tiger with a cold, not a very good sign but good enough, and Maria stamped on the gas pedal with all her leftover might, her only focus was to get as far away from the kidnappers' camp as possible.

BANG! BANG! Bullets pinged off the back of the jeep. They were nearly out of the camp, driving recklessly through makeshift cooking spaces and over beams of wood and sheets of tent cloth, kicking up a cloud of sand and dust in their wake. Sand dunes stretched out as far as any eye could see (a quick assessment meant they must have been in some sort of desert - Maria couldn't do much more than figure out that basic knowledge).

The bullets were fewer now, and so was her time left. Already, a blinking red light appeared in the corner of Maria's vision.

A few seconds later a message flashed across her vision:

System shutdown procedure initialising...

Final protocol run through...

Standby in...

3

2

1.

As Maria's vision flickered into pitch blackness, her final sensation was one of the car swerving, tipping, screaming arising from all around, and then silence.

So much for safety.

Chapter 10 by AvScorch



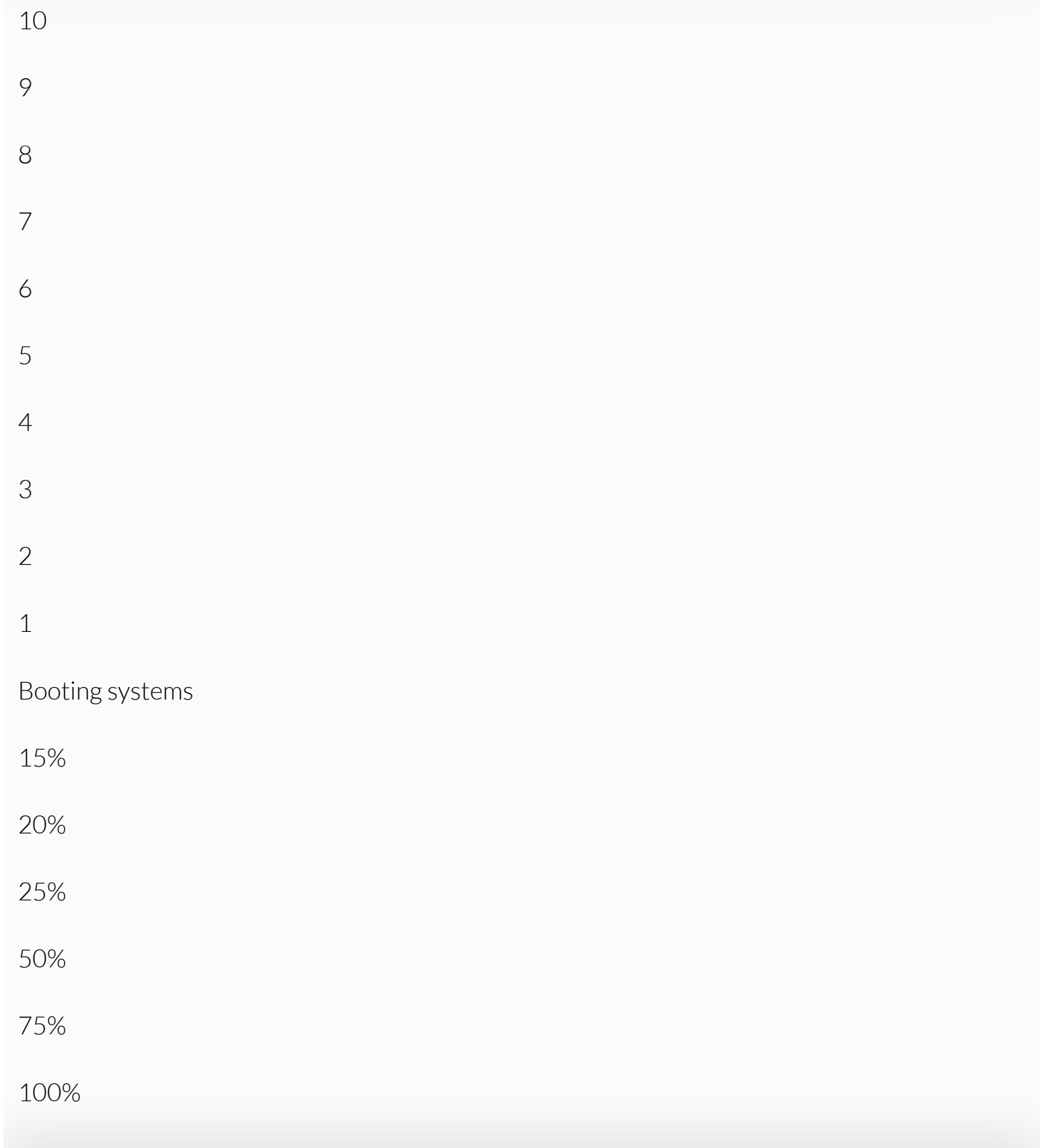
When Maria shut down the school bus, all the kids high fived each other "WOOO!" they cheered and then... Maria saw that she is playing the school sequence

Standby in

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System reboot complete

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When Maria woke up and  
and noticed the children w

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**Chapter 11 by Artemis**

Fear and sadness. That was all she could detect. The child that was alive was not Jean. Jean was dead. "No." she whispered. "I promised your mother to keep you safe. What have I done?" Bright blue liquid rolled down her cheeks. They were tears! They formed a puddle. Maria looked at her reflection. Each of her eyes had a small blue heart-shaped iris. She stood up. She was HUMAN now. But her brain was working like it used to. And her memory sparked. She remembered a voice talking to her exactly a week before she opened her eyes. It had said words in a strange language: "Σας δίνω τις εξουσίες που οι αρχαίοι θεοί δεν έχουν." It meant: I give you all the powers that the ancients did not have. That memory was what kept her thinking like the humans. A single tear from her eyes. It landed in the middle of Jean's forehead. He opened his eyes and they were glowing. Then, the light died down and Jean sat up and then fell asleep. Maria was speechless. "How?" she asked. A feminine voice spoke in her head. "Hello. My name is Holly. I am your original creator. You were right to murder Frank Aster my cousin. He stole you and killed me but I had magic and I placed myself in you. Now is not the time for stories however, we must save them." "How?" Maria repeated. "First," instructed Holly, "Take a single drop from you puddle of tears. Next, put on a child's forehead. Do this to everyone of them. Eventually, they will wake up. but hurry." Maria followed the instructions and 10 minutes later, every child was awake. The van was too broken to fix so she told Jean. Come let me take you and your captive friends to your house. And of they went. Into the sunset to find home.

**Chapter 12 by AyScorch**

12 hours later

When they finally got there the parents gasped "What is this strange sound"  
Maria thought

Searching total websites

Sound found Identified as "Gasn"

"We thought he was dead" the pa See more of Story Wars

Primary Task GET TO FAC

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Warning Internal Motherboard is at Critical Temp

Time till melting point: 15 days 20 hrs 12 min 12.5 s 121 ms

"NO NO NO" Maria Said as she was boarding the ship

Switching off internal motherboard Using secondary motherboard

Some functions will be disabled  
like being able to complete tasks

Running into the tunnel to the factory Maria went to the MARIA Fixing Unit  
BUT when Maria locked in she noticed it was the faulty one and started a fire in Maria's internal motherboard melting it faster The countdown was skipping all the way down to 0:00:00:00.000

WARNING SHUTDOWN INITIATED flashed across Maria's vision Then she blacked out

13 minutes later

Temporary Reboot initiated

Found problem Internal and Secondary motherboard melting Using external motherboard All functions except Movement, talking, Vision, and feeling will be disabled

Rebooting temporary systems

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When Maria woke up she saw the head factory workers

they both said "Are you alright" "Yes" she said "We are going to fix you up" the male worker said

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